

Testimony of Sharon Veatch  
Connecticut School Counselor Association  
*in regards to*

**H.B. No. 5037- AN ACT ADJUSTING THE STATE BUDGET FOR THE BIENNIUM ENDING JUNE 30, 2023.**

Appropriations Subcommittee on Elementary and Secondary Education

Public Hearing - February 17, 2022

Senator Osten, Representative Walker, Senator Miner, Representative France and respected members of the Appropriations Committee, my name is Sharon Veatch and I am a school counselor at Housatonic Valley Regional High School in Falls Village, CT. I am also the Chairman of the Board of Directors for the Connecticut School Counselors Association(CSCA). Thank you for the opportunity to offer testimony regarding HB5037- An Act Adjusting the State Budget for the Biennium Ending June 30, 2023.

**Specifically, I am here today to testify about the importance of school counselors and the need to fund additional school counselors so that every student has access to a school counselor.**

As a school counselor in a rural public high school, it has been a struggle to service the needs of all my students. We frequently hear the 250/1 ratio number from ASCA, but I can tell you with a smaller caseload than 250 it is still a struggle. For a rural school, access to counseling services for our low income families (representing 36% of my school population) has been a challenge. The increase in anxiety and depression in adolescents prior to COVID was alarming, but following COVID is epidemic. I work in a school of approximate 350 students and 7 students have been sent to the hospital or hospitalized due to suicide attempts. At least 10% of my population has been referred to outside support services or receives in house weekly therapeutic support. That doesn't include the students where we have talked to families, but don't know if support has been set up. Our local counselors are not taking new patients, our youth and family service bureau has a wait list. We are supposed to do short term therapeutic support, but provided bridge counseling services until a provider can be found is becoming increasingly necessary. This means I have to choose between working with a first-generation college student, or student with questions about future careers, and a student that is unable to learn due to social emotional issues. It is not an easy balance!

Self-Care on my part (I hate that phrase now) is not enough to deal with the overwhelming feelings of missing someone that is in critical need of services. We honestly deal with life and death situations in our job! ALL STUDENTS SHOULD HAVE ACCESS TO A SCHOOL COUNSELOR AND OTHER MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORTS. Most of my students have met me and thus feel most comfortable coming to me when they need help. Also, the earlier they have had access to a school counselor the more likely they are to reach out when help is needed. That is why elementary school counselors are so critical and should be in every school in the state of CT. We work with students for academic support (which is usually due to an issue other than comprehension), career and college planning, and the Social Emotion support services. We do classroom lessons on career search, college search, help supports in the school, Suicide prevention, Stress reduction, etc. to try and reach as many students as we can. It never seems to be enough. If you need stories, I have them – unfortunately too many – just ask.

As Chairman of the CSCA Board, I have been hearing the level of exhaustion and frustration from my colleagues across the state for two years. Trying to do more with less and adding a layer of a pandemic and outside mental health agencies with waitlists has increased the urgency. The mental health crisis for our children is real and not getting better, it is getting worse. School Counselors

provide the care that can help students navigate these issues so they can get back to the all important learning that needs to happen in schools.

We have hit a crisis point in our schools. Students trust us, families trust us, our teachers trust us, there need to be more of us especially now. Please consider support the funding for school counselors in all schools and additional school counselors in schools with high ratios above 250 (which is the max to do the minimum of service). We have a Master of Science degree in counseling, we are not “guidance counselors”, we are school based counselors. We are needed now, more than ever. Do what is right for the children and families of Connecticut.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

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